

Records Management in the State of Tennessee

The importance of properly managing state records derives from the information they contain and the evidence they provide about what government does. State records not only document past decisions, they often establish and protect current rights and responsibilities of both the government and the governed. They have an enduring value because they help us manage intelligently in the present and prepare for the future. State records are essential to administrative continuity.

In 1989, the State of Tennessee recognized the need to establish a coordinated State Records Management Program along with an improved Records Center operation. The program lacked analytical support and the proper resources needed to manage Records Center operations. The Records Management Division was established by Tennessee statute TCA §10-7-303, which designated it as the primary agency responsible for devising retention schedules and managing state records. Administratively separate from the Tennessee State Library and Archives, which reports to the Secretary of State, the Division is part of the Department of General Services and employs a full staff of nineteen employees.

The mission of the Records Management Division (RMD) is to establish a systematic program of controls to ensure economic efficiency, administrative continuity, and preservation of state records. The Division serves as the primary records management agency for the State of Tennessee and provides government agencies with the analytical and managerial support to manage records throughout their lifespan. It does this by giving agencies controls and procedures that encompass the maintenance, use, and final disposition of all records.

The Records Management Division is responsible by direction of the Public Records Commission (TCA §10-7-303) to serve as the primary records management agency for state government. As such, RMD directs the disposition of all records, including electronic records and computer output microform records; provides administrative support for the State Publications Committee (TCA §12-7-101); and manages the state's Paperwork Reduction and Simplification Act of 1976 (TCA §4-25-101), commonly referred to as the Forms Management Program.

The Division is organized into five operational sections:

- **Consulting and Analytical Services** - The consulting and analytical staff provides assistance in developing retention schedules, designing and purchasing automated information and micrographic systems, and developing agency records policies and procedures, including electronic record-keeping standards, files management, and cost benefit analysis. Also, this group offers training classes and annual records management seminars to assist state agencies with their records. The staff recently began an electronic records inventory of state records.

- **Record Center Operations** - Tennessee's State Records Center is one of two facilities in the state authorized as a storage facility for inactive state records. The State Records Center is located in Nashville with a total

storage capacity of 102,312 cubic feet. A satellite facility is located in Knoxville, Tennessee, at the University of Tennessee. State agencies in the eastern region have the option of storing their inactive records at this facility instead of transferring them to Nashville. Both facilities are secured with fire and burglar alarm systems, are available for use by all state agencies, and offer such services as storage, retrieval, and disposal.

- **Micrographic Services** – The Records Management Division offers micrographic services to all state agencies with the primary purpose of minimizing costs of records storage, maintenance, and retrieval. The services available are source document microfilming and digitizing, microfilm processing and duplicating, storage and periodic inspection of all types of microforms, assistance in or coordination of document preparation and technical consultation.

- **Forms Management Program** – This program seeks to reduce and simplify the number of forms used in state government by eliminating unnecessary forms, encouraging the use of statewide standardized forms, and promoting the sharing of information between agencies, thereby eliminating the duplication of information requested from businesses and citizens. It is estimated that 7,870 redundant forms have been eliminated through the Forms Management Program.

- **Publications Management** – The Records Management Division provides administrative support to the Publications Committee and its staff. The Publications Committee was established by the state legislature for the purpose of managing the cost and proliferation of publications printed by state agencies. RMD carries out the administrative functions of the committee through the agency's Publication Liaison and facilitates the publication authorization process based on established rules, policies, and guidelines.

RMD has recently issued a new manual of electronic record keeping standards to provide guidance and foster consistency for Tennessee government records created or stored on electronic media. The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure that the information recorded now will be readable in the future and, furthermore, that accountability and preservation of important state records can be maintained in the electronic environment. The manual is designed to provide guidance to state agency users and managers of computer systems about the problems associated with managing electronic records, identifying and disposing of electronic records with temporary value, and improving overall access to state electronic records.

The achievements of Tennessee's Records Management Program, coupled with cooperation of the Public Records Commission, the Information Systems Council, and the Department of General Services, have provided the support needed for the records management program to be successful. It is through these efforts and the cooperation of the state employees who participate daily in creating and maintaining an efficient and effective program in their agencies that the program has been able to accomplish and surpass its goals.